

Looking Back at McCardell: It's a Lot Like Looking at Today

By BERNADINE MORRIS

The Paris fashion world has Chanel as its monument. New York has Claire McCardell. Both women, though deceased, have influenced the current casual mood of fashion. Chanel invented the sweater, McCardell invented the American Look.

It was born in the Depression-ridden nineteen-thirties, flourished during the war years of the forties, fell off at the end of the fifties (McCardell died in 1958), and all but disappeared in the sixties, when Paris regained center-stage with swinging London close behind.

Now that sportswear, the crux of the American Look, has become the dominant trend on Seventh Avenue and other satellite fashion centers, the Fashion Institute of Technology felt the time was right for a McCardell retrospective.

It was held Monday night in the school's auditorium, 227 West 27th Street, followed by a \$125-a-person black tie supper dance in the lobby.

Like a Premiere

Seventh Avenue, which supports the state-run college, came out in droves. Students lined up outside the school to cheer arrival of the limousines carrying such personalities as Lynn Revson (whose husband, Charles, heads Revlon) in her sequin-sparkling red jacket over a black dress by Norman Norrell; Beth Levine, the shoe designer, in her Halston capstan, and Jerry Silverman, the manufacturer, with Pauline Trigère, in her Trigère.

It had all the earmarks of a Hollywood premiere, way back when.

Fashion retrospectives are a risky business. Paintings or sculpture can gain from distance, but clothes are, after all, keyed closely to the time in which they were worn. Times change and so do figures.

But there were cheers inside the auditorium as the clothes appeared on the stage, and the fervor grew as the show went on, proving the basic concept: These are styles that can be worn today.

"The clothes are so pure, they are timeless," explained



Claire McCardell's first success was monk's dress in 1938, at left. The bias cut flared dress with no waistline was worn with a wide belt. The forties were a fertile period when she developed her own style and the American sportswear look. Coverall, seated, was made for defense workers in 1942, one of first jumpsuits. Halter dress in cotton was innovative for evening in 1947, second from right. Bubble-shaped swimsuit of 1945 was belted like monk dress.



The New York Times/Tyrone Dukes and Larry Morris

Kasper, one of today's most successful designers. "Where the waistline is or where the hemline is doesn't matter. They're classics."

Bill Blass brought his assistant to show them what McCardell was all about, and Victor Joris said he felt like burning his fall collection and starting all over again. "She did what Chanel did in her day and it still has meaning for us," he said.

It wasn't only the designers who were enthralled. Freddy Pomerantz, the man-

ufacturer who started the Leslie Fay dress house in 1921, lamented that McCardell had come to him for a job years ago, but he turned her down "because she wanted me to use her name."

Sister Eileen Farley of Elizabeth Seton College, in Yonkers, guest of Philip Sills, who manufactures Bonnie Cashin clothes, said she was inspired.

"I'm sick of the students in blue jeans, telling me clothes aren't important," she said.

Line-For-Line Copies

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1957. And the night before, she ran up a halter dress in blue jersey for her daughter, Claire, who was named after her boss.

"She used to send her toys," said Mrs. Sustersic, beaming. Her daughter, a tall blonde like her namesake, is now Mrs. Philip Chillemi. She is 26 years old.

Phyllis McCardell, who is married to Claire's brother, Adrian, also turned up in a McCardell, a pink and taupe striped shirtwaist dress "circa 1951."

She had supplied a number of the dresses in the show from her personal archives.

"I always thought my daughter would wear them," she named Claire, after

lose 25 pounds and take them all back."

Her husband is chairman of the First National Bank of Maryland, in Baltimore.

Marjorie Griswold, the Lord & Taylor buyer who promoted McCardell as well as such other innovators as Rudi Gernreich and Emilio Pucci, wore an aubergine chiffon McCardell from she couldn't remember what year.

Clothes 'Quite Radical'

"Her clothes don't look so revolutionary today, but they really were quite radical," she observed.

"I'm so thrilled to be on the same stage as Claire McCardell," said Lee Evans, the designer for R & K, a division of Jonathan Logan which chalks up a volume of about \$60-million a year for dresses that are mostly in the \$35 to \$50 range. Mrs. Evans received the school's annual alumnus award for

who were important, like Adrian, but I always thought they made clothes for my mother—she made clothes for me."

For her acceptance speech, Mrs. Evans had the girls in her sample room make a yellow mohair cardigan that she tossed over a dolman-sleeve white sweater and long white pleated skirt. It was sportswear at night.

Miss McCardell's range was from beach clothes to evening things, in all of which she avoided shoulder pads or built-in bras. Her clothes wrapped and tied, flowed smoothly and never constricted. She was concerned first with comfort; out of that came style.

Some of the landmarks of

her work were on the stage: The monk's dress, which catapulted her to fame in 1938—a loose, bias cut dress, forerunner of the chemise that came 20 years later—that the wearer belted in and that fit everyone; the pop-over, a wraparound dress in the early forties, meant to serve the needs of the woman who had to cope for herself in the kitchen while her maid went off to the defense plants; jersey dresses tied around the waist with strings and as noble as a toga.

But more important than any of the individual styles was the attitude: clothes that are honest and free but never anarchic. If that concept takes hold, there's hope for the fashion business.

DINA MERRILL



they are twins," explained Freddy Lomerantz, the man



Lee Evans, shown with husband, Robert, won alumnus award. Claire McCardell was her idol.

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And innumerable designers, including Victor Costa of Suzy Perette, made elaborate notes on the styles they liked and planned to return to the school later to see how they were made.

Perhaps the happiest woman at the show was Bessie Sustersic, who worked as Miss McCardell's assistant from 1932 until 1958. Now Mrs. Sustersic works for Oscar de la Renta, but for the party she turned up in a red satin dress from Miss McCardell's last collection, in

37. And the night before, she ran up a halter dress in the jersey for her daughter, Claire, who was named after her boss.

"She used to send her dresses," said Mrs. Sustersic, smiling. Her daughter, a blonde like her namesake, is now Mrs. Philip Willem. She is 26 years old.

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She had supplied a number of the dresses in the show from her personal archives.

"I always thought my daughter would wear them," she named Claire, after her sister-in-law — but she ended out to be too short," said. "Now I'd like to

lose 25 pounds and take them all back."

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who were important, like Adrian, but I always thought they made clothes for my mother — she made clothes for me."

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Bessie Sustersic, McCardell's assistant, center, wore 1957 satin dress and whipped up McCardell copy in jersey for her daughter, Claire, left. Marjorie Griswold, right, also wore a McCardell, but couldn't recall from which year.

ham of 1896 Mouton-Rothschild and a case of regular bottles of 1929 Château Lafite Rothschild. The 1896 Mouton went for \$2,600 and the case of Lafite went for \$600.

The previous, high for a

one sale for \$2,600 of the 1896 reboam of Mouton was a good example of how wine has become a speculative commodity. The catalogue described the bottle as coming "from the private cellar of Mr. Howard Clay Story 3d of Philadelphia and Atlanta."

for in 1871.

The Masters Collection

A major group of sales yesterday was from the so-called Masters Collection of the Augusta National Golf Club, beginning with the 1945 vintage of Château Margaux. No Masters Tournament was held that year, but in each

power and beauty of nature. The flower

still blooms. Its name? The Amaranthe

... the flower that never fades. This

lovely legend is the inspiration for

Dina Merrill's Amaranthe cologne. Stop